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THE CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY, DECEMBER 28, IN IOWA CITY, IA.,
AT THE FIFTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF
THE CENTRAL DIVISION.

BY A. G. CANFIELD.

COEDUCATION AND LITERATURE.

Let me, by my very first words, relieve your minds of a possible dreadful suspicion and fear. I do *not* expect to impose that tax upon your patience that a full treatment of my subject, in all its aspects, would involve. The evening itself, to say nothing of your patience, would be all too short for that. And I do not forget that the occasion prescribes its limitations also. Tho we, as school men, can feel nothing foreign to our interest that has an intimate relation to the problems of our schools and to the ends that they serve, yet we are met here as modern language men—and women, I should be unpardonably forgetful of my theme not to add that—; students and teachers of modern languages and literatures. And, quite aside from such an impersonal recognition of what the occasion demands, it must needs be, from the very fact of my profession and its dominant interests, as a modern language man that I approach my theme.

What I shall attempt then this evening is not so much a discussion of the great question of coeducation, with reference to a criticism of its workings or its results, as an inquiry as to what, if any, suggestions the situation of

literary studies in coeducational institutions of higher education may have for us, the professional expounders and advocates of modern literature in them. It occurred to me that it would not be inappropriate to make this inquiry at a meeting of the Central Division of the Modern Language Association, since within the territory it represents the institutions of higher education are, with very few exceptions, coeducational.

No doubt the desire to avoid a too mouth-filling title has led to a somewhat oracular brevity. More than one of my colleagues, after reading the program, has asked me what I was going to talk about. "Coeducation and Literature" might suggest a survey of the modern fiction in which coeducation is exploited, for better, for worse; or perhaps the potency of the fair coed as a muse to inspire the undergraduate lyric poet. Or one might proceed from such a text to discuss the compromises, the reticences, the embarrassments, that the interpretation of great masterpieces of literature often presents in classes where young men and young women are found side by side, and which tend to limit the choice of works read and to leave the view of the content and significance of literature somewhat incomplete. Let me hasten to define my subject more precisely by saying that it is concerned with the distribution of literary studies between the sexes in coeducational institutions of higher education, and the possible influence of such distribution upon what we may conceive to be the tasks and the methods of the departments of modern languages in those institutions.

I must confess, however, that I could not help being solicited very persuasively by the larger aspects of the theme, as I have been considering it; and I cannot refrain from suggesting in passing the deep interest there

might be in ascertaining the distribution of all studies between the sexes in coeducational institutions where there is a considerable freedom of election. President Butler is reported to have observed lately that the programs of studies in the colleges for women are growing continually more like those in the men's colleges, and the inference would lie near that the educational ideal for women was becoming more and more like that for men. But it is a conspicuous fact in coeducational institutions under the elective system that the proportion of the sexes is not at all the same in different kinds of subjects, but rather varies greatly, some subjects being taken almost wholly by men, and others being taken by a correspondingly large majority of women. That certain courses, if not certain kinds of courses, are overwhelmingly feminine, if judged by the sex of the students taking them, is so notorious among us as to be the not infrequent subject of jest. This seems to say that while there is a tendency to say theoretically, by programs of study, that the education of women and of men should follow the same line, there is a tendency among men and women seeking their education side by side, with full freedom of choice, to establish practically a difference between them. It would be an interesting discovery if it should turn out that our undergraduate youth, in our coeducational institutions, have been recognizing, practically, very different masculine and feminine ideals of culture while our programs of study have been seeking a single ideal for all, and that the difference between these ideals has been growing more distinct, if not further apart, in practice, while in theory, as expressed in our curricula, they have been coming nearer together or uniting in one. We should like to know, too, just what the differences are which separate

the masculine culture from the feminine, just what are the elements that enter into each, how far women, in entering the field of liberal education under the same conditions as men may have so taken possession of certain portions of it that the men are inclined to abandon them, and whether coeducation has been all unsuspectedly one of the influences making for that transformation of the ideal of masculine culture, or of culture generally, which is the subject of so much comment in this beginning of the 20th century. Of course I am using the word culture here in the large sense to stand for the total product of education, and not in the narrower and somewhat old-fashioned meaning according to which it designated a certain fine urbanity of mind that moves with ease and grace, and dwells with delight, in the society of the great creations of the human spirit.

I turn aside, then, from these enticing questions to that which has a more direct and professional interest for us: What is the status of literary studies under coeducation? How do the sexes distribute themselves in literary courses? I speak, naturally, of modern literatures, tho, to enable us to interpret the situation so far as modern languages are concerned we ought to know that of the classics, also, and I regret that I did not seek information in this direction as well.

We need no statistics, I presume, to tell us that the languages and literature are favorite studies for our young women. We should not be in danger of the mistaken reasoning of a certain librarian who concluded that women are much less honest than men. He based his judgment on his observation that there was a great deal of trouble about the books reserved for reference in the Shakespeare and the Faust courses. These books, available in only a

limited number of copies, would be hidden, instead of being returned to the desk, especially in the period just before examination. The culprit, when detected, would almost invariably prove to be a woman. But if the librarian had known the proportion of women to men in those courses he would have known that the reason why the women were guilty of so many more offences than the men was the same one that explains why white sheep yield so much more wool than black sheep—there are so many more of them. Visit any class room where a course in literature is being given and there will be found such a one-sided predominance of skirts over trousers that one fancies there must be some deeper connection between petticoats and poetry than that of an accidental alliteration. It makes no difference whether the writer under consideration be Chaucer or Goethe, Shakespeare or Verlaine, Spencer or Victor Hugo, Racine or Schiller, Browning or Bodmer or Beaudelaire, we find uniformly a little group of men on one side of the room and compact ranks of women on the other. This at least has been my personal observation, confirmed by conversations with my colleagues. But to make sure that I was not dealing with a merely local situation, or with personal impressions derived from striking, but not necessarily representative, instances, I have collected information from six institutions, from widely different parts of our territory, that may be taken, I think, to show fairly what the facts of the case are in general. These institutions are Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Northwestern, Ohio, and Wisconsin. They represent over seven thousand undergraduate students pursuing studies for the bachelor's degree. The information asked for was as to the number of men and women taking courses in modern languages, separated according to de-

gree of advancement, and also those taking courses in English literature. The figures so gathered show conclusively that the situation is substantially the same in all these institutions, with such variations as position and local conditions may explain. During the first two years of modern language study, a little longer in German, a little shorter in French, while, that is to say, the study is elementary and is directed towards the acquirement of a facility in the use of the language, primarily for reading, about the same proportion of men as of women choose them. With courses beyond that point, as the end of the study comes more and more to be the mastery and appreciation of the content of the language as literature, the proportion shifts rapidly in favor of the women.

To begin with French. In four of the six institutions named the variation between the proportion of men and that of women in the beginning sections was not over one per cent. That is, if the number of men was fifteen per cent. of the total enrollment of men in the undergraduate department, the number of women was not under fourteen nor above sixteen per cent. of the total enrollment of women. The ratio of men to women in the classes in first year French was, in other words, the same as in the undergraduate department at large. In one of the institutions the proportion of men was greater because men from some of the professional schools were enrolled in the undergraduate courses. In the classes of the second year the proportion shifts decidedly to the feminine side. The number of men is smaller than in the work of the first year, being in some cases less than one-third, and in no case much more than one-half. The number of young women does not decrease, in four cases out of six; or falls off much less conspicuously, in the other two. In courses

beyond the second year, where the emphasis is placed for the first time on the content as literature, the number of men drops clear down towards the vanishing point, while that of women holds its own or increases, in every case but one. The result of this successive shifting of proportions is that in the courses dealing in French primarily with literature the total number of elections—not the number of students enrolled, which is certainly from twenty-five to fifty per cent. smaller, many students electing two, or even more, courses—the total number of elections is from one-twelfth to one-fifth (in only one case more) of the number of men enrolled in the first year's work, while among the women it is in one case greater, in three cases almost exactly the same, in the fifth case forty per cent., and in the sixth thirty. That is, in the institution where the fewest women take the literary courses in French their proportion is nearly twice as great as the proportion of men taking them where the number of men is the greatest. Men are accordingly in an immense minority in these courses, forming four per cent., or one man to twenty-four women where they are least well represented, and twenty-nine per cent., or one man to two and a half women, where they are most numerous.

But you may think that French, after all, lies somewhat under the suspicion of being a girl's finishing subject, a mere accomplishment! Let us look at German. The figures here are somewhat less uniform, owing perhaps to the varying importance of the German element in the population in the different regions represented. In the first year the enrolment of men is slightly larger proportionately than that of women, but there is no great divergence, save in one case where a notable excess of men

seems accidental, as it is balanced very exactly by an equal excess of women in the second year's work. The enrolment is smaller than that in first year French where German is well entrenched in the high schools, larger elsewhere. In the second year the proportion of men to women is not greatly disturbed, but there is a measurable gain on the side of the women. In the courses beyond the second year the gain is much more conspicuous. In only one case does the number of elections among the men equal the number of men enrolled in the second year courses, while that of the elections of women exceeds the number of women in the second year courses by from ten to two hundred per cent. Of the total number of elections beyond the second year those of men form but thirty-eight per cent. where they are relatively most numerous, and it seems that in these cases the figures include a number of men from the professional schools enrolled in undergraduate courses; where they are fewest they form but seventeen per cent. of the whole. And in the cases where the statistics furnished me permitted the separation of the third year from the more advanced courses, a further shift of the proportions was observable as the courses became more specifically devoted to the study of the texts as literature. As has already been remarked, the greater difficulty of German for the one learning to read it makes the period of elementary study longer for it than for French. While it will often happen that a student after one year of French will feel that he can manage to read it well enough for his probably limited purposes, he will hardly pass a similar judgment on his German before the end of the second year, and those who do not wish to stop short of a fairly fluent command of the modern languages for reading purposes will almost

as surely take a third year of German as a second year of French. The higher courses in German, beyond the third year, the courses in literature, seem then no less preponderatingly feminine than those in French.

And how stands the matter with the literature of our vernacular tongue? Is it not perhaps the lingual facility of our sisters that leads them, by a native aptness for language study, to these foreign literatures? But the fact that in proportion as the part of language is less in these studies, and the part of literature is greater, the ratio of the number of women to that of men increases, forbids us judge so. And the figures for the enrolment in courses in English literature amply justify the inference. In them women form from fifty-nine per cent.—where the total enrolment of men is swollen by recruits from professional schools—to eighty-five per cent. And here again, where it is possible to separate elementary from advanced courses, the proportion is noticeably greater in the higher courses. If, for instance, in an institution where women form seventy-seven per cent. of the enrolment in courses in English literature, we eliminate the introductory outline course in the history of English literature, we find that in the remaining courses the women form eighty-three per cent. of the enrolment.

It is sufficiently clear, it seems to me, that with regard to the distribution of literary studies between the sexes, the coeducational institutions show a considerable similarity. In all of them the women seem born to literature as the sparks fly upward. They outnumber the men from two to one to twenty-four to one. As an element of culture, still in the large sense of that word, literature has a distinctly larger place in feminine esteem than in masculine. Indeed, it further appears by these figures that

the place it holds in masculine esteem is not only relatively small when compared with that given it by women, but also that absolutely the part accorded it is very slight. The number of men pursuing French beyond the second year is but about ten per cent. of all. The number pursuing German beyond the third year is about the same. The number taking English literature, except the most elementary course, is sometimes as low as twenty-five per cent. The meaning of these facts would be different if there were large numbers, anything like a majority, of men, continuing as undergraduates the study of the classics, which in our old tradition of liberal culture formed the backbone of the humanistic discipline. But those numbers now, in the institutions being considered, are so small as not materially to affect the question. The total number of men, candidates for the bachelor's degree in our departments of literature, science, and the arts, whose preparation for that degree involves no substantial literary culture, is certainly great, in some institutions approaching, if it does not exceed, fifty per cent. The number of women in a similar case does not exceed one per cent.

I would not be understood as implying that there is nothing flattering to literature and to us who professionally expound it in this feminine preference and admiration. In certain moments, when I have pondered over these things and speculated on the hidden relationship between literature and the ladies, I have yielded to the insinuating voice of vanity, and have fancied that the disproportionate popularity of literature with the fair sex was the effect of personal advantages on the part of the teachers of literature. Perhaps we, in our individual qualities of mind, or of other kinds, make a special

appeal to the eternal feminine. That is a very flattering thought, certainly. Only we should have, in fairness, to account for the absence of men from our courses in a similar way, and admit that we, in our individual qualities, do not make any corresponding appeal to the masculine mind; and, with all deference to the ladies, my vanity has refused to be tickled by the thought of accepting that explanation. And on reflexion it does not seem possible that this explanation can be the true and sufficient one. The departments of language and literature have no monopoly of unmarried instructors. And it is against the whole theory of probabilities that so many men, selected by very different persons, at different times, on the basis of various recommendations, should all, uniformly, possess in such high degree the gift of appealing to the feminine mind, and lack in equal measure that of appealing to the masculine mind. We must, I think, accept the on the whole more comfortable explanation that it is the subject and not the instructor's quality of mind that is the cause of the proportion of the sexes among our undergraduate students of literature.

But tho this conviction is more comfortable than the other for us teachers of literature, it is far from reconciling us to the situation. It is only less unpleasant to us to know that the men find our subject unprofitable than to know that they find us unprofitable. This need not imply that we are insensible to the feminine preference, or that we underestimate the feminine mind, or that we give the masculine mind a higher rank. But being ourselves deeply persuaded of the real and important rôle that literature plays among the real powers of our world, believing in its enormous practical efficiency for informing and inspiring life, we deem it a pity

that men, who still for some time, at least, in our social conditions, will do so large a part of the world's work, should seem to pass it by, in the years when they are victualing themselves for the voyage, as something negligible and not worth while. Of course, I do not fail to recognize that there are other ways of expressing one's vital interest in literature than by taking courses in Shakespeare or in Molière or in Faust. I will even admit that there are *better* ways, and that the number of credits piled up in courses in literature is a very unsafe measure of one's genuine love and appreciation of its great works. I confess to sharing something of the skepticism more or less frequently expressed as to the success of the effort to teach literature, if by that we mean teaching how really to appreciate it. For real appreciation there must be enjoyment, zest, a spontaneous delight;—and there is something at once pathetic and grotesque in the laborious efforts made to communicate this by teaching or to appropriate it by study. It is like studying how to like olives.

It is even maintained that the attempt to teach literature in the schools is a fertile source of the distaste for reading so often encountered and so generally lamented. It is quite conceivable. The enforced consumption of a daily ration of ice cream might be an ordeal that the most robust native appetite for that delicacy would not be able to withstand in the long run. But such considerations would not have so much force when applied in the region of the university, where on the whole men and women take what they like. And in any case it would take a prodigious ingenuity to make them throw any light both on the absence of the men from literary courses and on the abundant presence of the women. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the one-sided distri-

bution of the sexes in the study of literature reflects a general impression that this study is especially appropriate for women and is correspondingly less appropriate for men. In the menu of university training, courses in literature are the bonbons and salted almonds—pleasant to nibble at, perhaps, but in no wise taking the place of a substantial and nourishing course, at least for the male stomach.

We do not get away from this conclusion when we reflect on the part which the professional aim plays in determining the elections of our candidates for the bachelor's degree. It is true beyond peradventure that the professional spirit dominates our undergraduate work for the bachelor's degree. We administrators of departments know that the feminine interest in literature is in the great majority of cases very intimately connected with interest in a teacher's diploma. When I see before me the nineteen young women and the one sad young man who are following with me the fortunes of French literature in the seventeenth century, I realize perfectly that the interest of these young women in the subject is secondary to a desire for a recommendation to teach French, and that if some other course had been pointed out to them as more conducive to that devoutly wished for consummation, most of them would not be studying the history of French literature, but would be found, with the same kind and degree of interest, in that other course. This does not mean that the young women do not really like the courses in literature. They do. But their liking is subordinated to professional ends, just as in case of the young man and his engineering, or his medicine, or his law. Our question is only carried back one step further, without encountering an essentially different answer.

Why do the girls choose to teach literature and languages? why do the men not choose to teach them? Here we are brought face to face with the disproportionately large place that women have in the secondary schools of our country, which gives them an advantage over men in the competition for places that both are equally well fitted to fill. But this fact, tho we allow it great importance, does not afford us a satisfactory escape from our position. In this usual assignment of the teaching of languages and literatures in the secondary schools to women, is this notion that literature is in some way of the feminine gender in no way involved? On the whole these considerations do not much disturb our conviction that our undergraduates take the studies that they like and that seem to them likely to prove practically useful and profitable—in other words, to be worth while.

It is reflexions such as these that we university purveyors of tongues are forced to make when we contemplate our classes. And we cannot help asking ourselves whether the coeducational situation has anything to do with the relative disesteem in which men hold literature as an undergraduate study. When I look at the sad young man who is the sole representative of his sex in my course in the history of French literature, I wonder whether this spectacle, repeated with slight variations wherever there is a purely literary course, may not contribute to shape the opinion that literature is preëminently a study for girls, and tend to discourage some men who might not otherwise hold poetry quite unworthy of their thoughtful consideration. With the hope of getting some light on this question I asked for information, similar to that just presented, from an equal number of men's universities and colleges. I received replies from Har-

vard, Yale, Columbia, Princeton, Williams, and Dartmouth. If coeducation has nothing to do with the case, the statistics from the coeducational institutions ought not to show any marked divergence from those of the men's colleges.

The answers to my inquiries allow no such unhesitating inference as those from the coeducational institutions. The difference in the matter of freedom of election, the large place still reserved in the one or the other of these institutions to the classics, which were left out of my inquiry, and other things still, like the different average social condition from which the students come, tend to make the figures ambiguous. But taking them as they stand, and making the allowances that seem called for, it appears that a decidedly smaller fraction of the men reach the bachelor's degree without some prolonged contact with literature as an undergraduate study than is the case in the other group of institutions. Whether freely chosen or merely submitted to, the literary element, or the element of the humanities, has a larger place in the notion of culture dominating the men's colleges than it has in the notion practically accepted by men in the coeducational institutions. This is not yet saying that the preference of women turns away that of the men. There are many factors to the problem. But it looks that way. And this impression is confirmed by undergraduate testimony in at least one of the institutions named. A course that is known to be habitually chosen by a relatively large number of girls is quietly set down by the boys as a course to be avoided, and the word is passed along. When for any reason courses in literature come to be recognized favorites of women, that very fact rouses suspicion in the minds of the men. So that what at first only reveals the degree of discredit in which the humanities are held by many as a part of a man's useful training for life

becomes in its turn a means of increasing that discredit. The large acceptance accorded these studies in the notion of culture practically asserted by women seems to be tending not to strengthen the position that they have in the notion of culture held by men, but to weaken and undermine it.

I have spoken as if it must be a matter of regret to us modern language men, not that literature is held in such high esteem by women as contributing to their preparation for the actual business of living, but that it is held in such low esteem by men. I believe that for most of us it is such a matter of regret. We should hardly have the same respect for our calling and the same zest in its pursuit if we deemed our work to be mainly that of putting a tool in the student's hand with which to work out the more quickly his professional success or his material prosperity. We do not think we are deaf to the claims of the new doctrine of education for efficiency, but we believe that efficiency relates to means rather than ends, and does not dispense us from considering the differing values of these. We refuse to understand efficiency as having to do exclusively with objects and purposes that concern our material comfort and convenience, or having more to do with them than with the creation, distribution, and enjoyment of ideal goods; as more concerned with the productions of nature than with the historic flowering and fruitage of the human spirit; as deeming rapid transit on this globe as immeasurably more important than free and sure movement in the world of ideas and imagination. An idea of efficiency is all too current that insists more on making a loud noise than on playing in time and tune; that would be satisfied by perpetually driving a hundred horse power automobile around a circular track at the rate of a mile a minute; that would be content to deflect

all the water of Niagara Falls to supply power to grind up our forests into paper for the Sunday editions of our newspapers. We are unwilling that such efficiency should be the measure of education. We have not yet surrendered our old fashioned belief in culture—culture in that narrower sense to which I have already referred. We cherish still, with Dean Briggs, a weakness for the Gentleman and the Scholar of old times, and a belief that something of his temper would not be out of place in our “hustling, bustling, trust-making and trust-busting” age,—and we are not sure, at first, at least, that the Lady and the Scholar will quite fill his place, or, at any rate, wholly prevent us from regretting his loss.

If I am not wrong, if I am really voicing the feeling of most teachers of modern languages, it follows that, while we congratulate ourselves, as we are wont to do at these gatherings, on the manifold evidences of our Association’s increasing prosperity and the continually widening place of the modern languages in our schools, we ought still to ask ourselves whether they are yet occupying the place they ought to fill, whether they have to any considerable degree succeeded to the place which the classics used to hold as the vehicle of a peculiarly humanizing culture. That the classics no longer hold it is beyond dispute, most of all in our part of the country and in the type of institution we mostly represent. It would seem that instead of the modern languages taking the vacant place, it has remained mainly unfilled, and that the masculine ideal of culture has largely rejected the element they offer. And while we recognize that many of the factors that have contributed to this change are beyond our control, and that a return in the direction of the humanistic ideal, if it ever come, must depend on many other things than our zeal, yet that does not make our zeal vain, nor forbid us

to ask whether there is not something that we might profitably do. How far, if at all, has modern language teaching been at fault in failing to make the most of its opportunities? What may we teachers do more or better than we have done to gain for the humanities as represented by literature a larger place in the notion of masculine culture? These are too large questions to be attacked at the end of a short address. We are well aware that criticism of our methods has by no means been wanting, and precisely in the last few years. The emphasis laid upon the doctor's degree has been denounced as a poor guarantee that the candidate for an instructorship possesses those qualities that will make him a communicative and inspiring representative of literature as a means of culture. Our tendency, not unconnected with this matter of technical training, to deal with literature as a material for scholarship and science rather than as a nourishing food of intellectual and moral life, has been asserted and lamented by some of our own number. We recall the provoking—in the good sense no less than the bad—essays of our colleague Babbitt of Harvard. Our too general confusion of graduate and undergraduate work has been regretted, by none more keenly than by some of those who are, in a way, a party to it. The need of beginning the study of modern languages earlier, and of insisting that it be carried, for some one, at least, beyond the stage of smattering, by prolonged and consecutive study, thru six years or more, has often been proclaimed. I cannot, I say, enter upon the discussion of these criticisms and suggestions. But it is fair to believe that some of the difference of views among our counsellors comes from the obscurity and confusion of the field. I shall be content if I shall have contributed, in however small degree, to illumine and clarify the situation.